

to some fine Americans. They represent a new generation of heroes, as great as any who have come before. Their example of unselfish courage inspires all who serve, and America will honor their names forever.

The sacrifices you have made will change the world for decades to come. By fighting terrorists in places like Baghdad and Karbala and Tikrit, you are making sure we do not face those enemies at home. By helping captive peoples gain their freedom, you have made a critical contribution to the history of liberty. And that means the world will be more peaceful and our children and grandchildren will be more secure. Your success is sending a clear message throughout the Middle East that the only force powerful enough to stop the rise of tyranny and terror and replace hatred with hope is the force of human freedom.

You are serving in a critical period in freedom's history, and there will be more difficult work ahead. Yet I'm optimistic about our future, because I know the character of freedom's defenders. I know the history of those who have defended our freedom. Fifty years ago this summer, the Soviet Union imposed a blockade on West Berlin. Keeping free Berlin alive seemed an impossible task, yet America and our allies refused to give in. From this airfield, American pilots launched dangerous missions to supply Berlin, and they continued those flights at great risk for 11 months. The heroes of the Berlin Airlift saved that city, and with their early resolve, they helped freedom triumph in the cold war.

Today, America is again called to defend freedom. And once again, our military is answering the call. I have hope for our country and faith in our cause and great confidence in the men and women who wear our Nation's uniform. With your courage, with your determination, and with your skill, the cause of freedom will prevail, and we'll achieve the peace that we all want for future generations to come.

Thank you for letting us come by. Thank you for serving our great land. May God bless you. May God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:56 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Maj. Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, USA, commander, 1st Armored Divi-

sion; entertainers Diane DeGarmo and the Gatlin Brothers; former President Saddam Hussein of Iraq; and Iraqi Shiite cleric Muqtada Al Sadr.

Remarks Following Discussions With Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda of Slovakia and an Exchange With Reporters in Bratislava, Slovakia

February 24, 2005

Prime Minister Dzurinda. Ladies and gentlemen, I'm very happy that the President of the United States is, for the first time, in Slovakia. This day is historical for my country. I have had very good debate with President Bush, telling him the basic orientation of our foreign policy. I appreciate the role of the United States, doing a lot of things in the world.

I told to President Bush that Slovakia supports the policy of the United States based on advancing freedom and democracy, based on preventing nuclear proliferation. This is why Slovakia supports the position of principle of the United States in many areas, regarding Iran, North Korea. This is why we support the effort of the United States to advance peace and stability in the Middle East and the democratization process all over the world.

I told to President Bush that there are many reasons why not only America but also the democratic world, including Slovakia, my home—we all need to have a strong President in the United States. And I'm very, very happy that the U.S. President is really very strong and courageous leader.

Thank you very much.

President Bush. Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister. I'm thrilled to be here. I have really been looking forward to this trip to Slovakia.

We just had a great discussion. First, I complimented the Prime Minister on putting policies in place that have helped this economy grow. The most important responsibility we have at home is to make sure our people can find work. And the President [Prime

Minister]* put a flat tax in place; he simplified his tax code, which has helped to attract capital and create economic vitality and growth.

I really congratulate you and your Government for making wise decisions. Slovakia is a great example of what can happen when people are set free. And this is an exciting place to be.

Secondly, I appreciate so very much the Prime Minister's vision on foreign policy. I want to thank you for having your troops by our troops in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Prime Minister understands that those of us who are free have a responsibility to help free others in order to make ourselves more secure. I'm so honored to have your commitment.

I told him that the supplemental that's working its way through Congress—in the supplemental there will be money for reimbursement to help our friends with troops on the ground.

I also talked about visa policy. The Prime Minister was very strong about reminding me that he wants there to be a different visa policy, a better visa policy for the citizens of Slovakia. He made the case very clearly on behalf of the citizens of Slovakia. I listened very closely to what he had to say. I told him that we will work with the Slovakian Government to reform the visa policy—reform in a way that conforms with the desires of our Congress, but nevertheless, the Slovakian people should see a different visa policy coming out of the United States because we've now got a roadmap that we both must work on. It won't happen instantly—the policy won't happen instantly, but the Prime Minister urged me to move down the roadmap. And I want to thank you for taking that leadership position as well.

Again, I want to thank the citizens of this great country for your hospitality. I want to thank my friend the Prime Minister for inviting me here in the first place and for extending such a warm greeting to me and Laura and our delegation.

Thank you, sir. Appreciate you.

Prime Minister Dzurinda. Questions were not planned, but I asked Mr. President

that the first visit needs to give an opportunity—

President Bush. Of course they were planned, Mr. Prime Minister. [Laughter]

Prime Minister Dzurinda. One or two questions, please.

Iran

Q. Mr. President, you've talked a lot about Iran in many of your meetings on this trip, and we understand that you did a lot of listening about incentives for Iran, using them as negotiating tools, if you will. And first I'd ask you, why will you not join the EU-3 in direct talks with Iran? And then, what would you approve of as possible incentives? Did you hear anything that you liked?

President Bush. I appreciate that. First of all, we talked about Iran here, with our great friend. The reason why we talked about it, because it's a world problem. And one of the things I wanted to make sure I heard clearly from our friends in Europe was whether or not they viewed the Iran problem the same way I did. And they do. Chancellor Schroeder and Prime Minister Blair and President Chirac all said loud and clear that the Iranians should not have a nuclear weapon.

And secondly, I was listening very carefully to the different ideas on negotiating strategies. We have a common objective, which is to convince the ayatollahs not to have a nuclear weapon. And I'm going to go back and think about the suggestions I've heard and the ways forward. But the key thing is, is that we're united in our—in the goal.

The most effective way to achieve that goal is to have our partners, Great Britain and France and Germany, represent not only the EU, not only NATO but the United States. And hopefully we'll be able to reach a diplomatic solution to this effort. We're more likely to do so when we're all on the same page, and I know we're on the same page on this issue when it comes to a common goal.

Prime Minister Dzurinda. The last one, please.

President Bush. Anybody from Slovakia who would like to ask a question to the Prime Minister?

* White House correction.

Visa Policy

Q. Mr. President, dropping of visa regime is probably the most important thing for Slovak citizens that would like to come to America and get to know your country. And I'm sure that all of them are very interested if you could tell us approximate date, when do you believe that these visas could be dropped? Thank you.

President Bush. Well, I appreciate you asking that. I can't give you a date. I wish—you know, if I could, I would. What I can tell you is that, one, the issue had been effectively put on the table by the Prime Minister and the Government; secondly, that we do have the way forward, a way to—look, the visa policy was basically set based upon decisions made prior to 1989. And so our policy still reflects overstays as a result of people who left when the people of this part of the world were not free. And we need to adjust that. We need to address those overstays in the light of people escaping a totalitarian regime. And we're in the process of doing that not just for Slovakia but for other countries in Eastern Europe. And we want to do this as quickly as possible.

Secondly, something else has changed, and that is the Slovak Republic has joined the European Union. And there is a new history now that that has been done, and that history needs to be included in the process. And so we're working our way through a new set of analyses that we can take to our Congress and say here's how people are—people from the Slovak Republic have behaved since free. And that's very important; that's very important.

It's—I can't predict how fast bureaucracies move. They tend not to move quickly. But the promise is, is that not only the President but the Secretary of State will do all we can to move this forward as quickly as possible, to be able to answer the question you asked, which is a legitimate question. I'm going to speak to this issue, by the way, in the square in a couple of minutes here, because I want people to hear that I am concerned about making sure our visa policy works.

Prime Minister Dzurinda. I'm very happy because Mr. President has confirmed that this problem is a part of his personal

agenda, so I'm very, very happy because of it.

President Bush. It is.

Prime Minister Dzurinda. We will continue on this tour. Thank you very much.

President Bush. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:15 a.m. in the Office of the Prime Minister. In his remarks, he referred to Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder of Germany; Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom; and President Jacques Chirac of France. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks in Bratislava

February 24, 2005

Thank you all. *Dobr den.* Mr. President, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Prime Minister, thank you for your strong leadership and friendship. Mr. Mayor, distinguished guests, citizens of a free Slovakia, thank you for your hospitality. Laura and I are honored, extremely honored, to visit your great country. We bring greetings, and we bring the good wishes of the American people.

With us here today is a group of remarkable men and women from across Central and Eastern Europe who have fought freedom's fight in their homelands and have earned the respect of the world. We welcome you. We thank you for your example, for your courage, and for your sacrifice.

I'm proud to stand in this great square, which has seen momentous events in the history of Slovakia and the history of freedom. Almost 17 years ago, thousands of Slovaks gathered peacefully in front of this theater. They came not to welcome a visiting President but to light candles, to sing hymns, to pray for an end to tyranny and the restoration of religious liberty.

From the hotel to our left, Communist authorities watched thousands of candles shining in the darkness and gave the order to extinguish them. The authorities succeeded in crushing that protest. But with their candles and prayers, the people of Bratislava lit a fire for freedom that day, a fire that quickly spread across the land. And within 20 months, the regime that drove Slovaks from this square would itself be driven from